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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Tuesday, April 12, 1938

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "LAWN AND GARDEN QUESTIONS." Information from the Bureau of Plant Industry, and the Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine, United States Department of Agriculture.

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Among the letters this week are several from listeners with lawn and garden problems. So these are to have first attention today.

One inquirer asks how to have a good lawn on heavy clay soil. Another is worried because she says she has no luck growing a lawn on sandy soil.

In general, you will be wise to refer grass-growing problems to the agricultural agent in your county who knows the situation in your locality so can give you best advise. Or your own State college may be the best source of information on lawns or gardens. But you are also welcome to a Department of Agriculture bulletin called "Planting and Care of Lawns." "Planting and Care of Lawns" is Farmers' Bulletin No. 1677, and you may get your copy by writing direct to the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., for it.

In reply to the two questions about heavy clay and sandy soil, Department-of-Agriculture men who have made a study of lawn grass have this to say. They say that good garden loam is always best for lawns. But if you have heavy clay, you can improve it by working in what would amount to an inch-layer of sand. Work the sand into the top of the clay soil 3 or 4 inches. Then, you can add some well-rotted stable manure. Even the granulated peats or humus now on the market would be helpful. A half ton of manure will fertilize about a thousand square feet of soil.

If the soil is too sandy, work in some clay loam. That will take care of texture. And again, add manure or humus to fertilize the ground.

Good soil is not the only requirement for a successful lawn. Drainage is also important, and proper grading and leveling, as well as fertilizing and preparing the seed bed, and finally the seed itself and the way you sow it.

The best time to start a lawn is in the fall because in the spring the weeds come up so fast. For spring sowings, you'll want to do everything you can to keep the weeds down and bring a thick stand of grass up from the very start.

Where you have a limestone soil, you can't beat Kentucky bluegrass for a fine lawn. Kentucky bluegrass has a strong root system and will stand a lot of adversity. If the soil is very good, you can plant bluegrass alone. But as it starts rather slowly, planting a little redtop along with it usually helps. In a decidedly acid soil, the bentgrasses do better than blue grass. Among the are colonial bent, seaside bent, South German mixed bent, and creeping bent.



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Sometimes lawn troubles come from poor drainage rather than from poor soil. If the subsoil in your yard is so compact that the water does not soak through easily, you may need to put in some tile drainage. But as I said, you can get details about drainage and soil and all the other points for a successful lawn either from your county agent, your State college, or the Department of Agriculture Farmers' Bulletin No. 1677.

A beginner at gardening writes to ask how thick vegetable seeds should be planted in the garden.

Our garden advisor replies that that depends on the vegetables you are planting and also on the seed. If your seed is a little old or of doubtful germination, plant thicker. But as thinning out plants is a tedious job, it is wise to use good seed and think of the job of thinning as you put it in. The thicker you plant, the more you must thin. If you plan to use beets and chard thinnings for greens, you can plant these seeds fairly thick. You can also plant onion sets an inch apart and then take every other one for eating green and raw. Later perhaps you can take every other one again, leaving the onions 4 inches apart to make large bulbs to store for winter. Scattering seed evenly is difficult. Many gardeners make it easier by shaking the seed from a paper envelope. Cut a small envelope straight across the end and shake the seeds with an even steady motion from the cut edge which you hold lengthwise of the garden row.

Carrots, spinach, radishes, lettuce, parsnips and parsley, you can sow at the rate of 4 or 5 seeds to the inch. Beets run 2 to 4 seeds to an inch. But at this rate of sowing, the plants will need thinning as they grow. Leaf lettuce plants should stand 5 to 7 inches apart for best development and head lettuce plants should stand from 8 to 10 inches apart. Carrots and radishes need to be thinned out until the plants are about 2 and a half inches apart while parsnips should be 3 to 4 inches apart.

So much for sowing vegetable seed. Now one question from a flower garden-er. This lady asks whether it is best to sow seed and grow her own plants or buy plants from a florist or nurseryman.

That depends on the plant and on the gardener's experience, skill and equipment. A few of the perennials that sell under variety names will not grow true from seed. So these may well be purchased as plants. Then some perennials are subject to disease when they are young and tender. You will probably be wise to buy the plants of phlox, peonies, iris and so on rather than trying to grow them from seed. But almost anyone can grow annuals from seed. Occasionally both perennials and annuals may be bought cheaper than you can raise them from seed. But for many people, the chief fun of gardening comes from raising their own plants from seed.

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